

Message Text

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TAGS: PINT, CA
SUBJECT: LIBERAL PARTY TO WAIT ONE YEAR TO PICK NEW LEADER

1. THE LIBERAL PARTY OF QUEBEC'S EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE DECIDED LAST WEEKEND TO DEFER HOLDING A LEADERSHIP CONVENTION TO REPLACE ROBERT BOURASSA UNTIL 1978. IN THE MEANTIME THE PARTY'S OFFICIAL OPPOSITION LEADER IN THE NATIONAL ASSEMBLY, GERARD D. LEVESQUE, WILL ACT AS INTERIM PARTY LEADER. HE WILL ASSUME HIS DUTIES ON DECEMBER 31, THE DAY BOURASSA WILL STEP DOWN. LEVESQUE WAS VICE PREMIER AND JUSTICE MINISTER IN THE LAST CABINET. HE COMES FROM A TOWN IN BONAVENTURE RIDING IN THE GASPE REGION LESS THAN 20 MILES FROM RENE LEVESQUE'S HOMETOWN.

2. LIBERAL PARTY PRESIDENT BEN PAYEUR SAID PARTY NEEDED A PERIOD OF MATURE REFLECTION BEFORE CHOOSING AN ULTIMATE SUCCESSOR TO BOURASSA. HE ADDED THAT PARTY WILL ORGANIZE A SERIES OF REGIONAL CONVENTIONS WHICH COULD LEAD TO A POLICY CONVENTION IN LATE 1977. LEVESQUE HIMSELF SAID THAT LIBERAL CAUCUS HAD REACHED A CONSENSUS THAT A LEADERSHIP CONVENTION SHOULD NOT BE HELD IN 1977 IN ORDER TO GIVE THE PARTY TIME TO REDEFINE ITS LONG-RANGE GOALS AND POLICIES. THE INTERIM LEADER SAID HIS TEAM WILL BE A POSITIVE BUT VIGILANT OPPOSITION WHICH WILL NOT OPPOSE LEGISLATION SIMPLY FOR PLEASURE OF OBJECTING, BUT WHOSE MAIN ORIENTATION WILL BE TO PROMOTE AND DEFEND CANADIAN OPTION FOR QUEBEC. HE NOTED, HOWEVER, THAT THE LIBERALS' FEDERALIST STANCE LEFT ROOM FOR IMPORTANT REDIS-

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PAGE 02 QUEBEC 00386 142127Z

TRIBUTION OF FEDERAL POWERS TO THE PROVINCE, PARTICULARLY

IN AREAS OF CULTURE AND IMMIGRATION.

3. IN DISCUSSING REDISTRIBUTION OF POWERS, ONE IMPORTANT LIBERAL - FORMER NATIONAL ASSEMBLY SPEAKER JEAN-NOEL LAVOIE - TOLD LE DEVOIR LAST WEEK THAT CANADA SHOULD DROP THE CURRENT FEDERAL SYSTEM IN FAVOR OF A CONFEDERATION OF FIVE OR SIX ASSOCIATED STATES. HE SAID THAT DELEGATING THE MAXIMUM POSSIBLE POWER TO THE PROVINCES AND MAKING CANADA A "NORTH AMERICAN SWITZERLAND" WERE THE ONLY MEANS TO STOP INDEPENDENCE MOVEMENTS IN QUEBEC, ALBERTA AND BC. LAVOIE ADDED THAT IN THIS TYPE OF CONFEDERATION, CENTRAL GOVERNMENT WOULD ACT ONLY AS COORDINATOR FOR SUCH MATTERS AS DEFENCE, CURRENCY, AND CUSTOMS. DESCRIBING HIMSELF AS "UNCONDITIONALLY CANADIAN," LAVOIE SAID QUEBEC NATIONALISTS WOULD FIND IN SUCH A PLAN THE ESSENTIALS OF "SOVEREIGNTY-ASSOCIATION" AND THE PARTI QUEBECOIS WOULD LOSE ITS SUPPORTERS AND RAISON D'ETRE. HE CONCLUDED THAT NO PLAN WOULD SOLVE CANADA'S LANGUAGE PROBLEMS WHICH WILL NEVER BE SETTLED.

4. COMMENTS: LAVOIE WILL BE SERVING AS PARLIAMENTARY FLOOR LEADER FOR GERARD LEVESQUE AND THE LIBERALS. THE RANGE OF OPTIONS THAT HE IS WILLING TO CONSIDER IN DISCUSSING FEDERAL-PROVINCIAL RELATIONS SHOWS THAT CURRENT THINKING IN OPPOSITION PARTY IS IN A STATE OF FLUX. IN FACT, LIBERALS WERE SO BADLY AND UNEXPECTEDLY MAULED IN LAST ELECTION THAT THEIR POLICY FORMULATION PROCESS HAS NOT ADAPTED TO NEW SITUATION AND THEIR PARTY LINE IS VERY INCOMPLETE. WHILE SOME FELT THAT THE PARTY SHOULD RUSH TO ELECT A NEW PERMANENT LEADER TO TAKE CHARGE OF FEDERALIST OPPOSITION BECAUSE "DISASTER" WAS JUST AROUND THE CORNER, NEAR TOTAL CONFUSION ON ORIENTATION OF PARTY GOALS AND POLICIES COMBINED WITH LACK OF SUITABLE LEADERSHIP CANDIDATES MADE DELAY THE BETTER OPTION. THIS IS ALL THE MORE SO AS NEWNESS OF CURRENT SITUATION HAS LEFT GOVERNING PARTY IN POSITION OF HASTILY FORMULATING FOLLOW-THROUGH ON ITS BASIC IDEAS, MAKING PLANNING FOR THE OPPOSITION PARTIES ALL THE MORE DIFFICULT. GERARD LEVESQUE'S RESPONSIBILITIES EXCEED CLASSICAL ROLE OF GOVERNMENT CRITIC AS HE WILL BE FORCED BY STATE OF AFFAIRS TO LEAD AND ORGANIZE FEDERALISTS ELEMENTS AND COUNTER-ATTACK PQ OUTBURSTS AGAINST FEDERAL SYSTEM. HE IS A SOLID, METHODICAL LEADER WHO PROBABLY WILL BE ABLE TO HOLD PARTY LIMITED OFFICIAL USE

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PAGE 03 QUEBEC 00386 142127Z

TOGETHER ORGANIZATIONALLY IN COMING TRIALS BUT WHO LACKS CHARISMA AND OTHER LEADERSHIP QUALITIES NEEDED TO FIGHT AN ELECTION (OR A REFERENDUM). IT IS NOT EXPECTED THAT HE WILL BECOME THE NEXT PERMANENT LIBERAL LEADER UNLESS ALL OTHER POSSIBLE CANDIDATES (SOME OF WHOM MAY NOT YET BE EVIDENT) DEFAULT IN ONE WAY OR ANOTHER.
GARLAND

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